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ABSTRACT

This handbook presents selected theories, activities, and resources which can be utilized by educators in the area of non-verbal communication. Particular attention is given to the use of non-verbal communication in a cross-cultural context. Categories of non-verbal communication such as proxemics, haptics, kinesics, smiling, sound, clothing, and laughter/play are outlined. Ten sets of activities which are common to all cultures are listed and described. Included are the categories of interaction, association, subsistence, bisexuality, territoriality, temporality, learning, play, defense, and exploitation. Cultural considerations in non-verbal communication are illustrated by narrations written by individual members of various ethnic groups. The emphasis in these illustrations is on the different meanings similar gestures, behaviors, and reactions have in different cultures. Classroom activities which can be used to improve and/or clarify students' understanding of non-verbal communication are presented. A bibliography of materials dealing with non-verbal communication is provided. (EB)

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# "GETTING THE MESSAGE ACROSS"

## Non-Verbal Communication in the Classroom

by

Jack Levy

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## INTRODUCTION

It has been stated that language only accounts for 35% of all communication, while the balance is passed on through some non-verbal medium (Nine Curt, p.1) "Communication" in this sense does not simply refer to the transmission of messages by a sender, but also to the subsequent filtration of those messages through the interpretive mechanism of the recipient. In order, then, for true communication to occur, both sender and recipient need to "be on the same wavelength," so to speak, both verbally and non-verbally. Even when speakers and listeners are members of the same cultural group and are utilizing similar linguistic systems the process of communication is difficult. (This probably explains the abundance of attorneys in the country!) The problem becomes more perplexing when viewed in terms of cross-cultural communication, where differing verbal and non-verbal mechanisms attempt to negotiate that "bridge to enlightenment," encountering many wash-outs in the process. That the successful delivery of messages has been elevated well above the "hit-or-miss" level should then be understood as another indication of the remarkable gifts and abilities possessed by humans.

Many messages, of course, still do not make it across the void. If the quality and effectiveness of the communication system most critical to the regeneration of our species is to be assured, then such misunderstandings and distortions must be kept to an absolute minimum. We are talking about the daily interaction between teachers and students - and the need for the passage of information to proceed without blockage. It is the intention of this handbook to present selected theories, activities and resources which can be utilized by educators in the area of non-verbal communication. It is hoped that, through application of some of the thoughts and procedures contained herein, those involved in the education process will become more secure in the knowledge that they are "getting their messages across."

Jack Levy
Fairfax, Virginia

April, 1979

## I. CATEGORIES OF NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

As language is perhaps the most valuable possession of human beings, it has necessarily received a huge amount of attention by professions and non-professionals alike. Linguists have made a number of attempts at classification of the uses and features of language, both verbal and non-verbal. Therefore, the categorization which appears below is not offered in isolation, but rather is intended for use in conjunction with other descriptions of non-verbal communication sub-divisions.*

| Category | Description |
|---|---|
| 1. Proxemics | 1. The use of space. Ordinarily, the distance between sender and the recipient. |
| 2. Haptics | 2. The study of touching. The amount of physical contact, or non-contact which occurs between sender and recipient. |
| 3. Kinesics | 3. Body movement, Various motions made by the head, hands and other parts of the body. |
| 4. Monochronism<br>Polychronism | 4. The ordering, or organization of, interpersonal relationships.<br>Monochronic - one-at-a-time. (Ex: Teacher interacts with one student at a time)<br>Polychronic - more than one-at-a-time. (Ex: Teacher interacts with many students simultaneously. |
| 5. Smiling | 5. Common facial gesture whose meaning is often misunderstood. |
| 6. Occulism | 6. Eye contact. Includes staring, quick glances, etc. |
| 7. Sound | 7. The presence of silence or noise within the lifestyle and environment of a group of people. (Ex: teenagers doing homework with radio, TV, record players blasting in background.) |
| 8. Clothes | 8. Always an indicator of self-expression. |
| 9. Laughter/Play | 9. What types of behavior cause laughter? By whom? What is the object of play activities? In what atmosphere are they conducted? |

## I. CATEGORIES OF NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION (Con't.)

| Category | Description |
|---|---|
| 10. Greetings/Farewells | 10. Is it done with warmth? Touching? Brevity? |
| 11. Paralanguage | 11. Accompanies verbal communication. Refers to tone of voice. |
| 12. Frankness/Reticence | 12. Accompanies verbal communication. Are messages straightforward? Curt? Rude? Honest? |

* Much of the information contained in this section was taken from:
Nine-Curt, Carmen Judith, Non-Verbal Communication. Fall River, Massachusetts: National Assessment and Dissemination Center for Bilingual Education, 1976.

## II. TEN SYSTEMS OF CULTURE

Since one of the aims of this handbook is to make the reader aware of non-verbal communication within a cross-cultural context, it is important to understand that culture is the way of life of a people, as indicated by their attitudes, material possessions, values and learned patterns of behavior. Those wishing to internalize these characteristics will do well to realize that there are sets of activities which are common to all cultures. Once again, professionals have supplied us with a myriad of hierarchies, taxonomies and other classification systems. The Ten Systems presented in this section have largely been taken from the work of Edward Hall.*

| Category | Description |
|---|---|
| 1. Interaction | 1. The way people behave when in the presence of others. |
| 2. Association | 2. The joining of people to form groups. |
| 3. Subsistence | 3. Methods utilized for survival. (i.e., hunting, fishing, white-collar, professional, etc.) |
| 4. Bisexuality | 4. Behavior which is categorized according to gender. (i.e., behaviors common to men within a culture, or those common to women). |
| 5. Territoriality | 5. The use of space. Includes taking and defending from other groups. |
| 6. Temporality | 6. Use of time. |
| 7. Learning | 7. Different styles of incorporating information. |
| 8. Play | 8. Methods of relaxation and enjoyment. |
| 9. Defense | 9. The process of protecting material and non-material entities. |
| 10. Exploitation | 10. Utilization of those objects which have been created by human beings. These material things can be viewed as extensions of bodily functions, i.e., the evolution of weapons began with the teeth and fists, and continued with atomic bombs. Tools are extensions of hands and feet previously utilized for similar functions. |

* Hall, Edward, Beyond Culture. Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1976.

## III. CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS IN NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

### Thoughts and Anecdotes

The issue of sterotyping has become so acute in the past two decades that one must view with extreme delicacy and sensitivity attempts at generalizing behavior on the part of cultural groups. Therefore, before the reader continues much further in this section, let him/her heed this WARNING: No description of the activities of any culture can include all of its members. The narrations which follow are intended as guidelines only, not strict or absolute delineations of group behaviors. Each is written by a member of the ethnic group being described, but the reader is reminded of another of our most valuable and selfishly-guarded possessions: our uniqueness. It is mankind's individuality which dictates the necessity for treating each person as a novel, singular unit within the larger framework. With this in mind, the following contributions are offered as cultural factors which the educator might consider when deciphering various non-verbal signals. It will soon become obvious that all cultural groups are not represented, a statement which is made with apologies. Whether or not a particular group is included in this text is strictly a function of the resources available to the author at the time of writing. It is hoped that the material will be accepted in the spirit of cross-cultural harmony. It is presented in no special order.

A. Native Americans - (This section is reproduced exactly as it appears in the original text)*

"COMMON ERRORS MADE MY TEACHERS

1. Praising Publicly (Indian children should be praised privately)

2. Scolding a child (Indian praents do not scold children)

3. Expecting an Indian child to look you in the eyes. In our tradition lowering eyes and head shows respect.

4. Not keeping confidential matters that are confidential

5. Making promises one cannot fulfill

6. Assuming child's natural parents are caring for him

7. "Staring" at Indian children. Consider this impolite

8. Referring to Indians as "Squaws" and "Bucks", is equivalent to the term "Nigger" for Negros.

9. Assuming child understands your meaning when he knows words. Example: "Come here", said to an Indian child leaves question in his mind; should one person respond, or two, or more? When should he respond, now or later? Consider that there might also be a hearing problem when he does not respond.

10. Expecting Indians to go home (leave) without being dismissed

11. Expecting Indians to tell you if they don't understand

12. Expecting Indian children to respond individually. They respond better in groups. Progress towaz s individual response will be gradual

13. Using out-dated expressions which have no meaning for children

14. Expecting discipline from Indian Parents. We are permissive don't want to frustrate children

15. Expecting a child to talk about himself before you tell about yourself

16. Giving impressions to news media that Indians are inferior

17. Failure to call on Indian children. Continue to call on them, don't ignore them simply because they fail to respond" (Lujan, p. 18-19).

* Excerpted from: Lujan, Melvin, "Educating the Children of The Taos Pueblo." Taos, New Mexico: Unpublished manuscript, 1978.

B. Vietnamese-Americans *

"...Things have changed drastically these days in Viet Nam, but the teacher-student relationship remains unchanged. Vietnamese students have great esteem and respect for their teacher. They think it is not polite to call him by his first name. So, do not feel upset if they address you: "Teacher", "Mr. Principal", "Mr. Superintendent". They stand up to greet their teacher whenever they see him and never talk back to him. They have so much confidence in their teacher that they tend to take for granted whatever he says. Because of their shyness, self-consciousness and their concepts of honor and dignity, they are reluctant to express their ideas and feelings for fear of making mistakes. They rarely volunteer to speak in class or ask for help unless encouraged to do so. The formality of a classroom in Viet Nam sets the teacher on the platform giving lectures, instructions, and assignments. Students are expected to listen to their teacher and do the assignments given to them. They may be at a loss if they are asked to do research on their own. What they need is step-by-step instruction and guidance." (Nguyen, p. 32)

* Excerpted from: Nguyen, Liem Thanh. Vietnamese Culture Kit. Ames, Iowa: College of Education, Iowa State University, 1976.

C. Black-Americans*

"When the 1970s opened, Afro-Americans discovered that the hopes that were born during the 1960s were beginning to fade. The legal gains of the 1960s abruptly ended. A strong reaction against Black demands for civil rights was triggered within the White community. A call for law and order arose. To many White Americans, law and order meant an end to Black demands and campus rebellions. Most political leaders, unlike those of the 1960s, did not include civil rights as major parts of their platforms. Candidates who championed law and order were elected mayors of several major American cities. Many White communities in the North strongly resisted efforts to integrate their schools. Anti-Black feelings and attitudes were expressed as opposition to busing. Several congressional anti-busing bills were enacted during the Nixon administration. In some communities violence erupted.

Despite this ominous sociopolitical climate, Afro-Americans continued their historic struggle for liberation in the seventies. Their emphasis shifted from pushing for integration to saving Black institutions, building self-help programs, and improving the Black community. As the larger society turned its back on the plight of Blacks in the early seventies, Afro-Americans thought deeply and acted reflectively about their future in America." (Banks, p. 257-258).

* Banks, James. Teaching Strategies for Ethnic Studies. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1975.

D. Hispanic-Americans *

"Time and Communication

Spanish-speaking students, especially those who are new to this country, have a different sense of time and definition of how time is to be used then we find in the United States. Here people seem to be in a hurry or race with the clock..."

"Communication

...Observers note that inter-personal communication in Hispanic cultures is most often oral or aural, whereas in Anglo cultures a greater proportion of communication takes place in writing..."

"Inter-Personal and Inter-Group Relationships

...In comparison to most Anglo culture groups, members in an Hispanic culture tend to sit or stand closer to one another in groups or in conversations...In many Anglo cultures a direct, prolonged gaze can create an uncomfortable feeling, whereas in most Latin American cultures steady eye contact in conversation or in public meetings is seen as evidence of a gesture of sincerity and respect among adults." (Hainer-Lake, p. C3-5).

* Hainer, Emma Violand de Edwina Lake. "Hispanic Learners and Anglo Teachers: Insights for Cross-Cultural Understanding." In Teaching for Cross-Cultural Understanding, Arlington, Virginia: Arlington Public Schools, 1978.

E. Chinese-Americans *

"...These include many native born Chinese-Americans whose problems are more in the area of self identity. On the one hand, they are born as Americans; but because of their physical features, they are distinctively Chinese or Oriental. They are educated in American schools and taught American thinking and ways of life outside their home. However, at home they are Chinese; they learn the Chinese language from their parents and also from Chinese schools in Chinatown. They eat Chinese foods and are taught Chinese ways of life such as to respect parental authority and family unity, and to be industrious, hardworking, Peace-loving, and law-abiding. Because of such dual living patterns, tensions and difficulties between the elders and the youths do exist in spite of strong family ties. Because of the complex characteristics of the symbolic Chinese written language, many young native born Chinese have difficulties in writing Chinese except their own name and some simple common characters. However, many of them realize the value of bilingual ability when they grow up; and then they take Chinese lessons in the colleges and universities.

There are some difficulties for the young native born Chinese to get into college for higher education and obtain better jobs because of occasional racial discrimination. However, these are usually balanced by the good school work and by the industriousness and dutifulness of the Chinese People."

* Chen, William. Multiethnic Reminder: The Chinese Americans. Rockville, Maryland: Montgomery County Public Schools, Dept. of Human Relations, 1975.

F. Jewish-Americans *

"The Klan, deciding to harass Mr. Levine, who ran a tailor shop in a hamlet in Mississippi, told the school children to stand in front of the shop every afternoon and shout, "Yid, Yid!"

The children set to their work with enthusiasm. Out came Mr. Levine. "Thank you, thank you," he said. "If you'll come back and do that tomorrow, I'll give each of you a dime."

The next day the children came back - with reinforcements; and after the hooting began, Mr. Levine distributed dimes to each kleine Klanner.

The following day -more children, more catcalls. But this time Mr. Levine only distributed nickels.

On the morrow the children returned, but go not a penny. "What's the idea?" they wanted to know.

"I'm sorry kids, but I can't afford any more advertising." sighed Mr. Levine.

The children never came back." (Rosten, p. 458).

* Rosten, Leo. The Joys of Yiddish. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968.

G. Korean-Americans *

"Gestures: In America, "thumbs up" indicates "okay" or consent and "thumbs down" indicates disagreement or "no," whereas in Korea, "thumbs up" means "the best," "number one," or "boss."

Waving of a hand, palm outward, with a vertical motion means "good-bye" in America, while the same movement signifies "come here" in Korea. Koreans count by bending fingers from the thumb to the small finger in order with one hand, while Americans use both hands. There are different sexual connotations between American and Korea in using fingers and hands: in America, to point with you middle finger is taboo, while in Korea, inserting a thumb between the second and middle fingers of the same hand or brushing the outstretched palm of one hand over the fist of the other hand implies sexual relations. The teacher should understand these connotations because there have been incidents related to gestures involving the Korean student, especially on the high school level. For example, an ESOL student from another country learns these connotations from one Korean student and uses them against another Korean student when they are involved in an argument which leads to a fight.

Forming a circle with your thumbs and your second finger signifies "money," while in America, this means a strong "okay." Koreans use their palms as scratch paper to write Chinese characters or foreign words or to do simple arithmetic, but Americans seldom write on their palms. Shrugging one's shoulders with a light movement of hands upward implies "I don't know" in America, while Koreans do not have the same movement but just shake their head horizontally to show the same meaning.

Americans put a sympathetic hand on a person's shoulder to demonstrate warmth of feeling or put an arm around him in sympathy. But in Korea, younger persons are

G. Korean-Americans (con't)

are socially prohibited from putting their hands on elders' shoulders or from tapping the shoulders of people younger than they. To put one's hands in his pockets while talking with others, especially with seniors, is avoided among Koreans." (Chu, p. D13).

* Chu, Harold. "The Korean Learner in an American School." In Teaching for Cross-Cultural Understanding, Arlington, Virginia: Arlington Public Schools, 1978.

## IV. TRAINING AND CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES IN NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

The following activities have been compiled from various resources and materials. They are intended for adaptation to diverse groups, depending upon learner needs. The reader should feel free to utilize these in any manner deemed appropriate.

1. Role Play - Student Needs Help (Excerpted from Same But Different by Ching, Hernandez, Maile, and Sanborn).

REHEARSAL DEMONSTRATION MODULE

Characters

Teacher
Student
Student - Alter

In class

Teacher: Begin writing and when you're through, submit your paper. (Starts to walk around the room)
Student: (shakes his head and frowns; turns around and watches the teacher steadily)
STUDENT ALTER: I need help.
Teacher: (sees student) Why aren't you working?
Student: (turns back to his work, attempts to write something)
Teacher: (goes back to her desk)
Student: (stares at his paper, bites his pencil, and glances frequently at teacher and other children's work)
Teacher: (sees student) Pay attention to your own work!
STUDENT ALTER: I need help.
Student: (sighs, puts down his pencil, and walks over to the teacher with his paper)
Teacher: (looks up) Are you finished already?
Student: (shakes his head)
STUDENT ALTER: I need help.
Teacher: Well, go back and finish it. You don't have much time.
Student: (goes back to his chair and looks around again)
Teacher: I told you to mind your own work!
STUDENT ALTER: I need help.
Student: (begins to fidget, tap his pencil, tap his foot, whistles softly, sucks in saliva, etc.)
Teacher: What's the matter with you?!
STUDENT ALTER: I need help.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

Have you had experiences similar to this?
Do teachers act prejudiced by only reinforcing verbal behavior?

2. Speaking Without Speaking -(Excerpted from Multicultural Education: The Cross-Cultural Training Approach by Margaret Pusch, editor).

OBJECTIVE

To demonstrate some non-verbal behaviors which are common between cultures, some which differ across cultures, and the meanings and feelings they usually communicate.

PARTICIPANTS

Two equal size groups of three or more persons each. Facilitator.

MATERIALS

None required.

SETTING

A room large enough to allow for some separation between the two groups.

TIME

Approximately one hour.

PROCEDURE

1. The facilitator may announce to participants that this session will deal with culture or even with communication; but he does not mention its focus on non-verbal behavior, lest the impact of the exercise be reduced. He then asks the participants to split into two groups of equal size, A's and B's, who then assemble at opposite ends of the room.

2. The facilitator first goes over to the A group. He tells them in a confidential voice that they are to choose a partner from the B group and engage in conversation. The subject of the conversation is not too important; it may be differences their partners may have noticed in the treatment of women in different cultures, different attitudes toward work and professional life, or some of the problems that interfere with good communication. It is essential however, that during the conversation each "A" will sit or stand about 4 inches closer to B than he normally would. All other behavior should be normal __ even the voice should be at the normal pitch.

IV. TRAINING AND CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES IN NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION (Con't.)

3. The facilitator now joins the B group, telling them in a confidential voice that they are to discuss the chosen subject with one of the A group, that the A's will come over to select them shortly.

4. Next the partners are asked to meet and go to separate parts of the room, relax, and exchange views on the chosen subject. They should not go out of sight of the facilitator.

5. After about five to ten minutes, the facilitator apologizes for breaking into the conversation and asks the A's and B's to return to their respective groups. He joins the B group this time and asks in a low voice, "Without looking back at your partner, each of you tell the others in this group, as best you can, what your partner "A" looked like. For example, did he/she wear glasses or not? Complexion? Clothing? Neat or sloppy? Hair?" Each is asked to share with his/her group whatever details he/she can recall.

6. Meanwhile, the facilitator returns to the "A" group. He asks them the same question about what they can recall about their partners' appearance. He gives a few minutes for them to begin to share recollections but then apologizes and breaks in.

7. He tells the "A" group that he next wants them to engage in a second conversation with their partners. Another subject is assigned them to discuss. This time the "A"s are told to avoid looking directly into their partners' faces; look anywhere that seems natural except their faces. All other behaviors should be normal.

8. The facilitator now asks the participants to rejoin their partners and he reiterates the subject they are to discuss. After five to ten minutes he again interrupts and asks them to gather, this time as a single group. He then asks for volunteers to describe how they felt during their exchange, "Did you somehow feel strange?" A brief discussion, about ten minutes, should be encouraged. Finally, the facilitator admits to everyone the instructions that he had been giving the "A" group and offers a short lecture concerning the significance of non-verbal communication.

9. Lastly, participants are asked to demonstrate examples for a discussion of specific differences in non-verbal behavior which they have noticed among themselves and other cultural groups. (Pusch, p. 203-4)

## IV. TRAINING AND CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES IN NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION (Con't)

3. Sociogram
   Group members form a living sociogram by placing and moving themselves and each other around the room in ways that are meaningful to them. The final form of the sociogram is drawn on newsprint.

4. Drum Dance
   Someone plays drums (or a recording of drums) while students dance freely. Drums stop suddenly, participants freeze, observe each other, and discuss their observations.

5. Body Talk
   Students take turns trying to express various emotions with their bodies. Leader hands each student a slip of paper containing the name of a feeling and the part of the body which he/she should use to express that emotion. Others try to guess the feeling expressed.

6. Trust Walk
   Class exercise. Students pair off, lead one another on blind walk to study interpersonal trust.

7. Nature Walk
   Students take a hike on a nature trail, without talking. They are told to explore as much of their environment as possible and to communicate their feelings to each other non-verbally.

8. Hand Talk
   Students pair off, move apart and face each other. Each member of a pair takes turns attempting nonverbally to communicate the feelings named by the leader. Feelings might include frustration, anger, joy, hate, tension, elation, etc. Each feeling is recited separately, with approximately one minute between announcements.

9. Ha-Ha
   Students lie on the floor, with each one having his/her head on someone else's stomach. One person begins laughing, and all join in.

10. Imaginary Object
    Students form circles of between eight and twelve members. Leader announces he/she will place an imaginary object having a spherical shape on the floor in the center of each group. Someone is to pick up the object, make something out of it, and pass it on. After about ten minutes, each group processes the experience, and the sequence is repeated with an imaginary cubic object.

11. Trust Fall
    Student stands with his/her back turned to another student. With arms extended sideways, first student falls backward and is caught by his/her partner. They then reverse roles and repeat.

12. Feeling Faces
With eyes closed, partners stand face-to-face, exploring each other's faces gently with their hands.

13. Tug-Of-War
Partners imagine a line between them on the floor and have a tug-of-war with an imaginary rope. One partner is to be pulled across the line.

14. Feeling Music
Contrasting styles of music are played (rock, folk, jazz, classical, etc.). Students act their feelings in dance.

(Activities 3-14 were excerpted from Pfeiffer and Jones, Vols. 2,3,4)

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